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ABSTRACT

A pilot study examined whether there is a "caste system" within the forensics community; what graduate students, faculty coaches, and tournament administrators can do to foster a sense of community and break down the caste system; and the role that formal and informal mentoring can play in this process. A survey was completed by 17 graduate students. Results indicated that a caste system does indeed exist in the coaching community. Findings suggest that students revealed several factors they believe to designate rank among coaches. These factors are team success, personal experience, friendliness, networking, and ethics. Students' suggestions for coaches included increasing social behavior, including graduate students in administrative activities and decisions, and promoting district relationships. Mentoring can include not only a close dyadic relationship between an older teacher and a younger student, but also peer mentoring. (Contains 11 references and a table consisting of the survey instrument and data.) (CR)

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Breaking into the World of Coaching: the Graduate Student Coach

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Breaking into the World of Coaching: the Graduate Student Coach

Introduction

Although it is less true today than in the past, the Hindu caste system divides society into four rigid hereditary groups. Each caste is separated from other castes by restrictions placed upon occupation and marriage. Movement between castes is slight. Caste members understand their place in the social hierarchy. Yet as rigid as this system appears, it may have a corollary within the Individual Events (I.E.) coaching community. Though less restrictive, the perceived station of I.E. coaches is often related to the coaching "caste" from which they are "bred." Their caste not only influences how others see them within the larger forensics community, but also designations of competence, respect, and social desirability.

At the bottom of the Hindu caste system is the group called the "Untouchables," the sector of society with the least privileged members, individuals unable to improve their social position much less interact with people from other castes. Graduate student coaches are often thought to occupy this caste in the professional coaching hierarchy. At times, they appear to be our "Untouchables." Despite their ability to connect with students, knowledge of current trends, and unerring dedication (Zeidler, 1993), they are sometimes not given the social and professional respect accorded others in the community. Many are inadequately trained and insufficiently prepared for life beyond competition. For these reasons they face an uphill battle in their attempt to gain approval for the professional establishment. Although some nationally known competitors may transcend the barriers between groups, graduate students with little national recognition or experience in Individuals Events can face an almost Herculean task if they want to achieve recognition as a person, much less as a coach, during their graduate education.

Institutions, as well as some I.E. coaches, can serve to perpetuate the caste system and prolong the graduate student struggle. According to Brownlee (1989), "Graduate students benefit programs in many ways, not the least of which is their status as cheap, and frequently ignorant [of their oppression] labor" (p. 94). As such, graduate students form a distinct sector of the coaching community, some finding it initially difficult, others impossible, to realize an identity as a competent professional. Yet when graduate students

are recognized not for the quality of their ideas or the expertise of their coaching, but for the economy of their positions, something is seriously wrong with the system.

This is not to say that some form of hierarchy is not a natural state for most organizations. Organizations would have trouble surviving without the constancy of their leaders. In addition, many graduate students are cast into the role of follower so that they might "learn the ropes" in order to better prepare themselves for future positions. However, we believe that, despite role necessities, the rigid, yet largely unacknowledged, hierarchy that exists in the coaching ranks is counterproductive, non-educational, and fails to promote the health of our activity. We sometimes forget that most of our current directors were once graduate student coaches. Joining the coaching ranks should not necessitate a "trial by fire" or membership hazing. Joining the coaching ranks should mark the start of satisfying experiences for both gradate student coaches and for their sponsoring programs. The experiences of our graduate students determine the direction and longevity of our activity. Browlee (1989) expresses this sentiment when he asserts that:

> Without question, the nature of modern forensics is shaped by the GA [Graduate Assistant]. But so too is the future of forensics. Where are we to find tomorrow's Directors of Forensics? They are today's GAs, just as certainly as most of today's forensics directors were once GAs themselves. The experiences they faced, the training and encouragement that they received, the reactions that they have to coaching, will determine the character of forensics' future (p. 95).

As coaches retire or seek out other professional paths, it becomes paramount that we produce a ready pool of capable individuals who are well trained in all areas of forensics and who desire to enter the ranks of faculty directors. It becomes our responsibility to pass the torch of leadership to the next generation. We need to foster a climate wherein graduate students desire to invest in forensics coaching and administration as a career. To accomplish this, we need to invest in them.

The Current Project

The current project was guided by three questions: (1) "Is there a caste system within the forensics community?" (2) "What can graduate students, faculty coaches, and tournament administrators do to foster a sense of community, and break down the caste system?" and (3) "What role can formal and informal mentoring play in this process?" Answers to these questions are based upon extant literature and a pilot

study on graduate student perceptions of a coaching hierarchy and modes of community building. The pilot questionnaire may be found in Table 1. Means and standard deviations for responses to the Likert items are found after each question. The number of respondents to our initial mailing was too small (N=17) to attempt any meaningful multivariate analysis. We will instead concern ourselves with graduate student responses to the open-ended questions. The project was also influenced by our own observations culled through many years of competing and coaching. Both authors moved from the graduate coaching ranks, through assistant director positions, to assume control of a large, nationally recognized I.E. program. In our performances of the latter role, we have both been responsible for the training and professional development of two to three fledgling graduate student coaches per year, many of whom eventually joined our ranks as colleagues at other institutions.

A Caste System within the Forensics Community

Reports from the pilot study, as well as our own observations, suggest that a caste system does indeed exist in the coaching community. Again, some form of hierarchy based upon organizational structure and decision-making power is bound to occur. The issue is the extent to which the hierarchy becomes restrictive and counterproductive. In order to examine the nature of the coaching hierarchy, we split our analysis into three sections: (1) factors that designate rank among the collegiate coaching population, (2) factors that designate rank among graduate student coaches, and (3) how increases in stature are achieved.

All Coaches

In their responses to open-ended question number four, students revealed several factors they believe to designate rank among coaches. These factors are team success, personal experience, friendliness, networking, and ethics.

Team success. Team success was mentioned by most of the respondents as a major determinate of a person's position within the community. Respondents believe that the pecking order for coaches has its roots in competitive success. Team success is seen as a measure of coaching competency. Coaches from successful programs are assumed to be more knowledgeable and better skilled than colleagues at less successful programs. Unfortunately, little consideration is given to the hardships faced by coaches in charge of smaller, less well-funded teams. Responses to this open-ended question revealed a perception that

"successful coaches have power." In fact, some students argued that coaches retain and demonstrate this power through selective socialization with coaches from other successful programs. They do this by, for example, forming tightly knit, elite peer groups, "that is to say," offered one respondent, "that a particular group of coaches from successful programs...created a social circle." It is also our observation that it is often the case that if individuals with limited training or forensics experience are hired by well-known, successful programs, they are immediately elevated to an "unearned" position of status.

Personal Experience. Although, as discussed above, team success can substitute for the status attached to knowledge and training, there is also no substitute for personal experience. Respondents wrote that status is attached to the "name that you have made for yourself." This variable includes a coach's training, their seniority in the activity, experience in leadership roles, and overall longevity. Responses seemed to indicate a curvilinear relationship between experience and longevity, such that older coaches needed to be perceived of as "current" in terms of performance trends, literature selection, and topics in order to enjoy the status associated with experience.

Friendliness. The perception of friendliness as a status marker was woven through the responses. It appeared frequently under such labels as "personality," "positive attitude," and behaviors that "transcended competitiveness" such as "positive oral critiques after rounds," insightful ballot-writing, and the "creation of a fun and friendly learning environment." Recent trends in the activity (e.g., social gatherings, dress-down tournaments, coaching awards, etc.) suggest that the forensics community is currently attempting to address the desire for a friendlier competitive environment.

Networking. Some of the respondents suggested that it is not "what you know," but rather, "who you know" that gives a person power on the circuit. Participants revealed that the caste system elite communicated frequently with colleagues, students, and tournament administrators in an effort to maintain and enhance both personal and team status. Through the graduate student lens, networking is "a political issue". Stated simply, "status is obtained by how much 'schmoozing' one does at tournaments." While not all networking is seen as promoting personal agendas, we would argue that members of the community develop communication patterns to ultimately fulfill some need, whether that need is professional or personal.

Ethics. On a positive note, it appeared that the perception of "fair-play and honesty" assumed a marked role in the determination of coach placement in the forensic hierarchy. Stated one observant, "I have seen coaches from highly successful teams, who still do not get much respect because they will 'do anything to win', including unethical maneuvers." If a coach's actions seemed suspect due to unfair rankings, the hiring of biased judges, tampering with tournament scheduling, or creating a hostile competitive climate, graduate students deemed these individuals as occupying a lower caste than their more ethical counterparts.

Other. While the survey responses provided invaluable insight, our experience leads us to suggest other "key" variables that did not appear within the data set. For example, we believe that caste placement arises from the position one holds within the organizational structure of a program. A program director usually has more leverage than his or her assistant director does. Also, holding an elected leadership office within one or more of the state or national forensics governing bodies also can indicate status. A final indicator of status is associated with the tournament(s) a school hosts. If the school's tournament is perceived to be an important tournament (i.e., well attended and difficult), and if that tournament is well run, a degree of status is conferred to the program's coaching staff.

Graduate Student Coaches

Although there appears to be a caste system amongst the whole coaching body, there also appears to be a loose hierarchy among graduate students. Graduate student coaches can be distinguished in three respects: competitive success, program affiliation, and social skills.

Competitive Success. Although it is a truism that oftentimes the best competitors do not make the best coaches, successful competitors carry the status associated with their accomplishments with them to graduate school. Top former competitors have status, which relates to coaching ability, due to their success in national or regional competition. Of course, their accomplishments also give them additional benefits. Top competitors are generally well known by coaches via their competitive success. This adds to their prestige and makes it easier for them to garner perceptions of competence.

Program Affiliation. Program affiliation is also important for graduate students. As much as adequate coaches can gain instant prestige by associating themselves with a successful program, so too can fair competitors gain a measure of respect through their association with a top forensic school.

Social Skills. Despite the prestige that competitive success and program affiliation brings, graduate student social skills are also extremely important in defining their status. On occasion, fellow graduate students and coaches negatively sanction former champions who misbehave or assume status not yet accorded them.

All of these categories are based upon initial perceptions of competence. The question remains, however, if graduate students can increase their visibility and, if so, how do they go about enacting this change?

Increasing Prestige

In our estimation, there are several ways in which graduate students can improve their status in the coaching ranks. While they may start out as "untouchables," they can improve their lot in life. Ways in which graduate student coaches increase their status include demonstrating professionalism, engaging in ethical behavior, networking with other students and faculty coaches, honing their social skills, demonstrating positive audience behavior, and writing clear and insightful ballots.

Fostering a Sense of Community and Breaking down the Caste System

Open-ended questions one, two, and three were concerned with what graduate students believe can be done to foster community on the forensics circuit. We break their responses into three groups organized by question: (1) what faculty coaches can do, (2) what graduate students can do, and (3) what tournament administrators can do.

Faculty Coaches

The suggestions graduate students offered coaches focused around three key themes, (1) increasing social behavior, (2) including graduate students in administrative activities and decisions, and (3) promoting district relationships.

Social Behavior. There seemed to be an almost universal call for making the tournament experience more focused on social aspects than on competitive rigor. Respondents offered many suggestions for increasing the social quotient of tournaments from "encouraging extra-tournament socialization with other teams," to "treating everyone equally." The majority simply wanted coaches to "change their philosophy to encourage socialization and a friendly competitive atmosphere." A practical suggestion was that coaches should encourage, rather than discourage, their students from discussing issues

on the Individual Events listserve (IE-L). This, it was argued, would help to build the national community of forensics educators and allow graduate students to establish identifies apart from the programs they served. Two negative strains also appeared in student's responses. The first was that some head coaches did not make enough of an effort to introduce their graduate students to other coaches, thus helping their graduate students build collegial relationships with outside faculty. Students also suggested that the circuit was much too political. Some suggested that inter-team rivalries hurt their ability to foster relationships with graduate students from other programs.

Administrative Activities. Many graduate students believe that including graduate students in more administrative activities can develop community. Highlighted activities include tournament and budget planning, and encouraging attendance at coach's and district meetings held throughout the year. These activities would seem to fulfill two purposes. First they serve to augment any formal training a graduate student might be lucky enough to receive, increasing their knowledge base and competency in team management skills. The second purpose would be to give graduate coaches a sense of ownership in their team. Students working on their master's degrees only coach in a program for two years. Assigning graduate students to do some of the administrative duties, rather than sheltering them from paperwork, allows them to assume partial ownership of their squad and learn new skills. Unfortunately, not all graduate students are ready to assume paperwork duties. One way to ease this transition would be a forensics class such as that proposed by Kostoff and McKeever (1989). They designed a model course geared towards helping the forensic graduate assistant to adapt to the specific needs of the forensic program. Their suggested course outline covers such areas as coaching, administration, budgeting, fundraising, student discipline, travel concerns and socialization. These are all areas new graduate students need training in if they aspire to someday assume charge of a team.

District Relationships. Although we were surprised that students mentioned a district affiliation response, it came from more than one of our respondents. Students desire to focus more on "in-district" tournaments in order to generate a strong local forensics *community* as opposed to a national *identity*. The comment that best exemplifies this position comes form a graduate student who wrote that coaches should:

> Continue to promote strength of district. Being exposed on a national level to prepare for national tournaments is beginning to manifest itself at local tournaments when schools travel across the

> country because they have been blessed with decent budgets. Local tournaments without enough attendance (10 schools) are beginning to fade away. Basically, revisit the notion that national tournaments are not the end all - be all, the health of forensics is.

This is a very interesting suggestion. Implicit in this suggestion is that the community many graduate students desire to be a part of is local.

Graduate Students

Graduate students had the fewest suggestions for what they themselves could do to encourage a sense of community on the speech circuit. Their responses focused on two issues, forming social and professional relationships with coaches, and ballot-writing.

Social and Professional Relationships. There were many suggestions for how to improve social and professional relationships in order to build a sense of community. Implicit in these suggestions was demonstrating a sense of fair play to the community. Many student suggestions centered on simple activities: talking with other coaches, talking with students, and sharing ideas with other teams. The graduate students saw themselves as a primary source of encouragement for "undergraduate learning." There was also a suggestion that graduate students need to express more interest in going to meetings and workshops that they might otherwise be inadvertently excluded from, if only due to a perceived lack of interest.

Ballot writing. Apart from their obvious pedagogical utility, ballot writing and critiquing were also viewed as ways to forge relationship with other coaches. Several respondents suggested that ballots could be used a reason to meet people. Ballots need to demonstrate knowledge and fairness as a way of illustrating graduate student skill and objectivity in judging events. One respondent even suggested giving "oral critiques after rounds," although we would not concur with this suggestion.

Tournament Administrators

The final key to community building is action that can be taken by tournament administrators. Although one respondent suggested that tournaments were "already doing enough," most other respondents felt that there were several options for improving community relationships at tournaments. Options suggested by students coalesce around three general themes, social activities, tournament workshops, and tournament administration.

Social Activities. Individuals felt that tournament administrators could do more to promote social relationships. Suggestions included "social gatherings for both students and coaches," "being more welcoming to out-of-district teams," and "greeting sessions" to be held at state meetings. A final suggestion centered on the coach's lounge. Graduate students implied that promotion and use of a coach's lounge could make it a major arena for socialization.

Tournament Workshops. The graduate students in our sample were in favor of tournament workshops. Not only did respondents feel that workshops provided a forum for learning techniques and sharing ideas, but they also felt that workshops served a social function. In addition, some graduate students felt that they would be able to demonstrate their competency by participating in or running tournament workshops.

Tournament Administration. An unexpected response form the graduate students was that tournament administrators could do more to invite guest coaches and *graduate students* into tournament tab rooms. Again, this suggestion invites coaches and graduate coaches to both learn more about tournament practices and one another, as well as to demonstrate competency in tournament administration. Some students offered that tournament directors would be well to invite beginning or low-profile coaches into their tab rooms as a way of as a way of helping these coaches bolster their social standing. Otherwise, the invitation into a tab room becomes just another way for high profile coaches to close ranks and demonstrate their social standing in the community.

We agree with all of the suggestions made by students. We also believe that there is a largely untapped source for community building. This is the establishment and nurturing of mentoring relationships.

The Role of Mentoring

In preparing this paper we were saddened to read the words of Davenport (1990) when he expressed that:

> The author [Davenport] soon realized that most of his knowledge and philosophy of coaching and judging had been achieved either trough "trial and error" or through occasional "tips" along the way from colleagues. The author received very little instruction and training in developing

> coaching techniques and judging philosophies as a graduate student, even though he was coaching in an established forensic program (1990, p. 1).

In a 1990 paper on mentoring, Carver and Larson-Casselton called for the establishment of formal and informal mentoring programs. Apart from several state and local initiatives we are familiar with, little has been done to accomplish her recommendation at the national level. In a follow-up report, Larson-Casselton (1991) had this to say regarding mentoring relationships.

> Mentoring...needs to begin with assistance given to our graduate students. We often assume that our graduate students have the background they need to be effective coaches. One or two classes (if any), are not enough to teach areas such as, how to prepare and defend a budget, ballot writing, handling of interpersonal conflicts, how to balance classroom needs with travel needs, etc. (Larson-Casselton, p. 10).

So what is mentoring? According to Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike, and Newnan, (1984), mentoring is "a relationship in which a person of greater rank, experience, or expertise teaches, guides and develops a novice in an organization or profession" (p. 327). In this case it would be older forensic professionals "looking out" for younger coaches and taking responsibility to see that they are effectively and thoroughly trained. Our current discussion of mentoring focuses on two concerns: (1) the character of mentoring, and (2) alternative forms of mentoring.

The Character of Mentoring

According to Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron (1981), "Within the academy, mentorship most often occurs in the informal but special sponsorship that a graduate student receives from a senior professor. In this context, the mentor becomes a roles model, providing academic advice and eventually assistance in gaining access to the profession" (p. 315). Forensic mentors can also serve very specific purposes. Larson-Casselton (1991) suggests that:

> a forensic mentor might be a person who supplies information to newer coaches about tournament practices and procedures, who introduces newer coaches to other coaches, who helps to develop the self-confidence of newer coaches, who promotes newer coaches to administrators on their own campuses, who helps newer coaches to develop ethical and philosophical positions related to the activity, etc. (p. 3).

Alternative Forms of Mentoring

As discussed, mentoring is usually seen as a close, dyadic relationship between an older teacher and a younger student. However, this does not always have to be the case, nor should it. According to Kealy and Mullen (1996), "The growing importance of mentorship in several areas of education enterprise calls for innovative ways for understanding mentoring relationships." (p. 3). Two ideas appropriate for alternative mentoring programs include community mentoring and peer mentoring.

One way to build community is for all coaches to shoulder the "burden" of mentoring their younger counterparts. Not all coaches are good at all aspects of forensics. It is important to recognize that mentoring activities may also occur at levels other than the traditional one-to-one dyad. For example, Head, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall (1992), suggest optimizing the functions of mentoring by developing a "mentoring mosaic" that taps other resources—a network of secondary mentors—to address shortcomings in the primary mentor-mentee dyad (Kealy & Mullen, 1996, p. 8). This form of mentoring would serve to build relationships between all members of the professional coaching community.

A second form of mentoring involves peer mentoring. This would also help to build the community of graduate students and ensure that graduate students have peer resources. Writing about a past mentoring program, Dunn, DeWaters, and Williams (1996) reasoned that "it occurred to faculty in the mentoring program that a number of students who were currently mentees were more than capable of taking on the more active and responsible role of serving as mentors to new students"(pp 6-7). The forging of this type of relationship is often ideal. In fact, Zeidler (1993) suggests that "The power that peer actions play in the socialization process of newcomer TAs [Teaching Assistants] is enormous. Peer mentoring programs are one such way to harness this power" (p. 78). We need to encourage second year graduate students to take ownership of their incoming, first-year counterparts. Some graduate students feel awkward asking questions of faculty members for fear of being perceived as less knowledgeable or inadequate. However, newcomers usually have an easier time dialoguing with peers because the pressure to impress is eliminated and they are not threatened.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to examine the coaching caste system and suggest ways in which individuals and forensic programs can build community. We are still waiting for a national response to

calls for mentoring programs. In the meantime, we, as coaches, need to do everything that we can to ensure that our graduate students have the type of experience we either had, or dreamed about having. Only then will our future be assured.

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Table 1

Directions: We are interested in your experiences as a graduate student coach. Please either circle your response or place a check in the space provided.

1. What degree are your currently pursuing? MA/MS _____ Ph.D. _____ Other _____

2. If you are a Ph.D. student, did you coach at the college level before returning to work on your doctorate? Yes _____ No _____ N/A _____

3. How many years have you been a graduate student coach?
   a. Less than one year
   b. Between one and two years
   c. Between two and three years
   d. Between three and four years
   e. More than four years

4. What is your sex?
   a. Male
   b. Female

5. What is your ethnicity?
   a. African American
   b. Asian
   c. Hispanic
   d. White
   e. Other Please explain _____

6. What is your marital status?
   a. Single
   b. Married
   c. Widowed
   d. Separated or Divorced

7. How many years did you compete in collegiate individual events?
   a. Did not compete
   b. Less than one year
   c. Between one and two years
   d. Between two and three years
   e. Between three and four years
   f. More than four years

8. Which national tournaments did your current school attend last year? (please circle all that apply).
   a. Pi Kappa Delta
   b. DSR-TKA
   c. AFA-NIET
   d. NFA Individual Events Championships
   e. Other Please explain _____

9. If you attended the AFA-NIET or NFA Championships, what was your best placement in an event?
   a. Qualified for the national tournament but did not break into out-rounds
   b. Quarter-final round
   c. Semi-final round
   d. Final round

Directions: Next is a series of questions. Read each statement and respond by placing the number which best represents your opinion in the space provided.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	No Opinion	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. _____ I was a successful competitor. (M = 5.88, SD = .93)

2. _____ The team that I coach is successful at the national level. (M = 5.47, SD = 1.37)

3. _____ The last team that I competed for was successful at the national level. (M = 5.94, SD = 1.39)

4. _____ Coaches from successful programs are more highly regarded on the circuit than coaches from less successful programs. (M = 5.53, SD = 1.46)

5. _____ Graduate student coaches from large successful programs are more highly regarded on the circuit than coaches from less successful programs. (M = 4.94, SD = 1.52)

6. _____ To be respected as a graduate student coach on the circuit, you need to have been successful as a competitor. (M = 4.71, SD = 1.69)

7. _____ I want to become a faculty coach some day. (M = 4.12, SD = 2.37)

8. _____ Graduate student coaches are respected for their unique insights. (M = 5.00, SD = 1.06)

9. _____ To be respected as a graduate student coach on the circuit you need to write insightful ballots. (M = 5.41, SD = 1.23)

10. _____ To be respected as a graduate student coach on the circuit you need to have come from a successful program. (M = 4.18, SD = 1.78)

11. _____ To be respected as a graduate student coach on the circuit you need to be coaching at a successful program. (M = 4.18, SD = 1.74)

12. _____ To be respected as a graduate student coach on the circuit you need to know and socialize with the "right people." (M = 4.76, SD = 1.75)

13. _____ I interact freely with coaches from successful programs. (M = 5.47, SD = 1.07)

14. _____ I interact freely with graduate students from successful programs. (M = 5.65, SD = .70)

15. _____ I interact freely with competitors from successful programs. (M = 5.53, SD = .87)

16. _____ I pay more attention to ballots written by coaches of successful teams. (M = 5.0, SD = 1.70)

17. _____ I pay more attention to ballots written by graduate student coaches from successful teams. (M = (4.71, SD = 1.57)

18. _____ There is a hierarchy of coaches based upon past competitive success. (M = 4.82, SD = 1.51)

19. _____ There is a hierarchy of coaches based upon years coaching. (M = 5.47, SD = 1.33)

20. _____ There is a hierarchy of coaches based upon friendliness. (M = 4.94, SD = 1.93)

Directions: Below are a series of questions. Please feel free to respond to as many or as few of them as you wish. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

1. What can coaches do to develop a sense of community on the circuit?

2. What can graduate student coaches do to develop a sense of community on the circuit?

3. What can tournaments do to facilitate interaction between faculty and graduate student coaches?

4. Is there a coaching hierarchy (pecking order) and if so, what is it based upon?

Thank you for your time and assistance with this survey.